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Box 15
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Bureau of Land Management Ecoregional Assessment and Implementation
Jack Connelly Interview
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SAGE GROUSE RANGE WIDE ASSESSMENT

He has been involved in both the 2004 Sage Grouse Range-Wide Assessment and the 2010 update. His role was as a main editor. His job is as a scientist with the ID Game and Fish.

How and why of landscape-scale assessments and planning
Initiated by the need to bring together information on sage grouse because of the petition for listing. There was a general consensus that the information across the western states needed to be compiled.

SCALE:
The scale or range of the assessment was from Western SD/ND and Alberta west to the Cascades and eastern California, and south to Arizona. This scale was largely driven by the range of the sage grouse and their habitat. However, in their analysis, the looked at both range-wide analysis as well as population trends.

ROLE OF SCIENTISTS/MANAGERS/RESOURCE SPECIALISTS
The sage grouse technical committee of the Western Sage Collaborative took on the task of compiling the assessment. They went after people/scientists with a strong background in shrub steppe conservation and sage grouse. Initially it was informational – with scientific analysis. The editors of the analysis were Steve Connick, Mike Schroeder, Van Stiver, Jack Connelly). Most of the contributors in the first volume were wildlife biologists and scientists. It was published as a scientific publication. It was extensively peer reviewed.

The process they used to compile the assessment was to ask individuals to work on different chapters in the volume. They were free to engage other scientists as they saw fit. The editors put together an outine to assess what they could accomplish. The two main topics of focus were 1) status of the sage grouse across their range and 2) the status of the sage brush steppe.

They assembled the data for all the states and provinces that had GiS data on sage grouse leks. They had to clean it up to integrate it into one data base. The information was not necessarily compatible. Some of the states were not comfortable with the information gathered from one state to another, so they analyzed by discrete populations. Some people were working on population trends. Steve Kinnick pulled together the vegetation layer/sage brush steppe.

Everyone sent their chapters to the 4 editors, who compiled it into a report. They submitted it to the Ecological Society of America, where it was sent out for extensive peer review. They revised and edited the report based on this feedback. Then they sent the report to the USFWS. In 2004-2005, they were

considering whether to list the sage grouse, so they used the report as the basis of their decision-making. They determined listing was not warranted.

The USGS made the data available through a sage grouse website. Steve Kinnick and Jack started a new project to turn the information in the report into a book that as more user friendly. It came out as a book rather than a report to be used by the field.

Because of political interference, the FWS were mandated to revise the data. They asked the editors to redo the assessment with updated information.

In the meantime, more sophisticated techniques were developed for trend analysis. In addition, they wanted to look at a broader science base – for example, the Wild Horse and Burrow information and fire. So they went after the best scientists again, but broadened the topics because people wanted more information. (If you are going to do an assessment, you need the best folks) They looked at the scientific community and tried to get those who were the more well versed.

And in the meantime, new information had come to light. For example, Bill Baker's research on fire in sage vegetation, new information on genetics and west nile virus.

They asked for updated data sets from the states/provinces. They had to spend time cleaning up the data again – even though there had been more standardization since the last publication. However, the people working on various chapters obtained their own data.

The managers were not at the table at all throughout the assessment. However, Jack works with managers every day, so he chose issues for revision that he knew would cover key management issues. However, he noted that administrators have a short attention span. These assessments take a long time, so you need to prepare them that it will take time – and be conservative, don't overpromise.

Much of the current management is on allotment scales, so managers/specialists need these kind of assessments to make decisions.

The role of scientist is to provide information for decision-making. Scientists are not (and should not be) decision-makers.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC:
The public had no role in the assessment.

How and Why of translating assessment and planning process into day-to-day management

ROLE OF SCIENTISTS/MANAGERS/RESOURCE SPECIALISTS
Not involved in the translation into day-to-day management

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC:
He was not involved in the step down into day-to-day management.

What worked and didn't work??

What worked well:

- *Used people with good track record.*
- *Were able to assemble information that was relevant for decision-making range-wide*
- *Keep the assessment informational, the scientist did not try to be decision-makers*

What didn't work:

- *The contributors in the first publication were not identified/credited by chapter, so people couldn't tell who had done the work.*
- *They knew there would be political problems because some of the administrators didn't want them to do the report.*

Lessons Learned – What would you do next time?

1. In the second edition, they identified individual contributors by chapter.
2. Somebody is always going to be challenging the science, so to deal with this, you need to get the best science and have it peer reviewed. Rely on people with a solid track record.
3. Also, it is important to use a neutral process in selecting the peer review. They picked a topical expert on sage grouse- who had a background in population ecology and was outside the process.

Key Assumptions

	Assumption	True	False	Explanation
ECOREGIONAL ASSESMENTS must be:				
1.	Focused on key questions			Yes – generally.
2.	Grounded in conceptual models linking key attributes and change agents			Models are only as good as the people who make them. It needs to be grounded in science and include conceptual models (although you don't always know all the change agents and functions).
3.	Focused on synthesizing existing information not on collecting new information or on conducting research			Synthesize the existing data is important. However, you must have the opportunity to collect new data or conduct research if it will measurable improve the product.
4.	Transparent			Yes.
5.	Approached as an ongoing process not as a one-time ad hoc effort (regions and units of analysis must be systematically defined, data must be managed)			Yes – because you are dealing with dynamic systems.
6.	Scaled to address landscape issues but not too large to be politically unmanageable			Ambiguous. It depends on the issue. You need to define the scale relative to the problem at hand.
7.	Informative not decisional			Yes – scientists should not function as policy makers. And the information depends on who is producing it. If it is the USGS sharing information, then that is OK, but if it is a wind developer providing information, then maybe not that reliable.

	Assumption	True	False	Explanation
8.	Other			
ECOREGIONAL DIRECTION must be:				
9.	Developed through an iterative process involving multiple organizational levels Developed through a collaborative process to the extent cross-jurisdictional action is required			True. You need to share with the field to get buy-in on the findings. You need to provide input on how they are supportive. Yes, it needs to be collaborative. But you need somebody at a very high level saying "this should happen" – both from the states and the feds – and you need to use the best available science.
10.	Consistent with the public disclosure, public participation, and interagency coordination requirements associated with planning and environmental impact assessments			You have got to follow the law, but don't confuse public participation with scientific rigor. Look for the public input at the front end. Make sure the assessment covers key issues.
11.	Grounded in agency mission and authority			Yes.
12.	Built on existing agency work processes such as land use planning, use authorization, budgeting, and project design and implementation			Not necessarily. Only if the agency procedures are efficient and effective. The process should be developed through the best available science rather than dogma or standard procedure.

	Assumption	True	False	Explanation
13.	Other			The scientists job is done after giving information. It is the job of the local working groups (comprised of agency and public) at the level of the community-based conservation groups to boil down the science to make it available to the public.
MANAGEMENT must have the opportunity to:				
14.	Identify the key management questions the assessment will answer			Yes – get the managers.
15.	Participate in critical decision points during the assessment process and in the development of ecoregional direction			Generally true. Some pitfalls - such as managers clinging to old methods they were taught 30 years ago. They need to participate openly and embrace the current science.
16.	Other			
FIELD RESOURCE specialists must have the opportunity to:				
17.	Validate and supplement the assessment information with finer-scaled local information			Always helpful – if the information is collected in unbaiased fashion. It is valid if it is rigorous and unbiased.
18.	Help define how assessment information may be used in day to day management activities			Yes – should help in definition – with the scientists/managers/resource specialists.
19.	Other			
PARTNERS must have the opportunity to:				
20.	Help identify the key management questions the assessment will			Yes – they should help – contribute to identifying the key management issues.

	Assumption	True	False	Explanation
	answer			
21.	See their work incorporated into the assessment where appropriate			Yes.
22.	Help develop ecoregional direction			Yes – this seems a reasonable place for involvement.
23.	Other			
What other suggestions do you have for an effective process and use				
24.				One problem he has typically seen – that the agency doesn't have the expertise to do what they want to do – so they use generalists who don't have the expertise. It may cost more, but the agency needs to get people with the expertise to do it right the first time and can get going right away.
25.				